Master’s Portfolio Project: Internship
Report of Internship Experience

Introduction

I would like to begin the report of my internship experience by relating it to an approach to job-embedded learning that evolved from the early development of adult learning theory. Almost a century ago, Lindeman (1926) wrote, “…the approach to adult education will be via the route of situations not subjects” (p. 8). Lindeman continues: “The situation approach to education means the learning process is at the outset given a setting of reality. Intelligence performs its function in relation to actualities, not abstractions” (p. 9).

My job-embedded internship experience took place with the Institute for Professional Development (IPD) in the College of Education (COE) for the purpose of re-designing, refining, and launching online professional development courses for the “Teach NM” Transition to Teaching program. This program was funded by a federal flow-through grant from the U.S. Department of Education to the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED). NMPED contracted with COE/IPD to administer the program, which provided professionals in other fields (who wanted to become teachers) the opportunity to take online courses that would lead to alternative teacher licensure. The professional development coursework was maintained and delivered through a portal on the IDEAL-NM website. IDEAL-NM is New Mexico’s statewide eLearning program, which was situated (during this time) between the New Mexico Public Education Department and the New Mexico Higher Education Department. IDEAL-NM offers no cost access to its statewide learning management system, which “serves as a platform for the delivery of online and blended learning” (idealnewmexico.org).
Description of Work Projects/Assignments

The overall project involved four primary tasks for which I was responsible. These tasks and my specific role relative to each are described in the paragraphs below. I was also responsible for coordinating work among technical staff and content experts.

To begin, I was responsible for assessing course content of six existing professional development courses that had previously been delivered in a classroom format. These courses consisted of:

1) Classroom Management
2) Standards Based Lessons and Assessments
3) Professional Development
4) Special Education and Inclusion
5) Opal (Online Portfolio for Alternative Licensure) Overview
6) Portfolio Camp

Assessing these courses involved the need to determine any enhancements and modifications that might be necessary to improve the design of the courses for online delivery through the Blackboard Learning Management System. This led to the formulation of strategies and plans for making appropriate changes to courses based on the unique content of each course as well as the needs of the learners/participants. The courses were also designed using Universal Design principles with intent to meet the varied needs of participants including the hearing and visually impaired. This experience enhanced my understanding of needs assessment as it relates to the analysis component of the ADDIE model of instructional design.
Next, I researched and edited the layout for possible new sections or features in the online courses. As part of this aspect of the work, I was responsible for producing a consistent visual image that would be maintained throughout all the courses offered as part of the Transition to Teaching professional development package. Also, it was important to consistently maintain and backup the templates and image archives from within each course. This practice was necessary so that instructors or other designers were able to access the contents and images of the course within the learning management system.

My work then involved incorporating multimedia resources and collaboration tools as part of the course design. The multimedia resources could include the use of a combination of different content forms including educational videos, podcasts, text, images, animation or interactivity. Also, Wimba was the web-conferencing collaboration tool accessible in the Blackboard Learning Management System at the time. Another component of my work relative to this task was to ensure that the multimedia resources could be delivered to viewers at sufficient speed and quality across multiple standard and mobile devices.

After completing the above tasks, the courses were uploaded for delivery online and assessed by project team members to determine if any changes needed to be incorporated prior to “live” delivery. Once this was completed, I then reviewed each course thoroughly to troubleshoot and repair any problem before the course was made accessible to participants.

Self-Evaluation of Work Undertaken

Overall, I would rate the contribution I made to this project as meets or exceeds expectations. Although I felt some trepidation initially about the goals and expectations of the project, I felt confident that I could learn what I needed to know, and do, to be successful.
Having not completed all of the program courses at the time of the internship, I felt some reservations about my knowledge, skills, and abilities in evaluating my first task of assessing course content and determining enhancements and modifications. As I started reviewing the course content and understanding how to incorporate it within the capabilities and features of the Blackboard Learning Management System, I felt that I had a sense for integrating the content and the capacity to design a rigorous and interesting learning experience. That said, I had to work within the constraints and parameters of what the instructors wanted for their courses.

Regarding the task of producing consistent visual layout, backing up and maintaining templates and image archives, I believe that I performed at an acceptable to good level. As the project progressed, I better understood how to use the tools in the system to achieve consistency and was more aware of what material needed to be archived. By the end of the project, I would rate myself as highly proficient relative to this task.

In evaluating my contribution to the task of incorporating multimedia and collaboration tools into the course design, I believe that I performed at a good to exceptional level. I also found this component of the work to be most interesting and meaningful. In this task, I researched the many different forms of multimedia that could be used to improve the coursework and meet the learning objectives. I spent much time and effort comparing the multimedia options to make sure that what was selected would effectively enhance the content of the module and be engaging for the participants.

Finally, in evaluating my contributions related to the development of the final product for online delivery, I believe that I met or exceeded all expectations. I was able to communicate effectively with team project members to explain nuances of the learning management system, address issues, and resolve problems throughout the duration of the internship.
How the Internship Developed Skills or Professional Goals

The work that was undertaken in the internship allowed me to further develop and enhance my knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions as a future instructional designer and/or eLearning consultant. Having been through a more traditional, classroom based educational experience prior to my admission into the OLIT master’s program, the internship gave me an opportunity to improve my skills in developing a range of instructional materials and products in an online learning environment. For example, using Mayer’s principles of multimedia learning, I learned how to effectively incorporate video, audio, and imagery into the learning design to replace or enhance text based information and create a more engaging learning experience. I feel that I developed more knowledge and skills about how to appropriately and effectively integrate the use of multimedia in ways that could enhance participants learning.

The internship offered my first opportunity to work hands on within the back-end of the Blackboard Learning Management System. As a result, I gained the ability to navigate within the system, understand its functionality, and use this knowledge to build content aligned with the instructional objectives for each course in the Transition to Teaching program. I recognize that the knowledge and skills I gained working with Blackboard will be very transferable to future eLearning projects in any LMS environment.

The internship also gave me an opportunity to apply concepts that I had learned in the OLIT 535, Theory and Practice of Distance Learning course regarding interaction, social presence, transactional distance, and social construction of knowledge. As I worked within the system, I realized the need to enhance interaction and reduce transactional distance because the courses had previously been taught face to face. In transitioning to a distance education model, I found information from OLIT 535 regarding social, intellectual, and cultural distance to be a
very important consideration. For example, relative to social distance, prior to moving the training to an online format, the program participants were brought together for a focused two day workshop. This workshop provided an environment where individuals transitioning to a new teaching career could interact directly with one another and develop more feelings of closeness and support. By moving the training online, I had to consider how to reduce the social distance and find ways for participants to create more affinity and dialogue with each other. This was accomplished by creating a space within the discussion forum and encouraging participants to introduce themselves, post their photos, share their background and experiences, and express their thoughts and feelings about this opportunity. The instructor would facilitate the activity to help reduce intellectual distance as well as cultural distance and promote participant engagement. The activity was also incorporated to help improve initial “learner – learner” and “learner – instructor” interaction. Related to all of these factors, I recognized that the courses needed to be developed with the use of interactive tools such as asynchronous discussion boards and synchronous web conferencing that would allow for collaborative learning and the social construction of knowledge.

Working on this project gave me the opportunity to interact and consult with course instructors regularly. Although my past working experiences required communicating with others, this experience enhanced my communication and consultative skills as well as my listening abilities. I had not previously worked directly with educators/subject matter experts. Consequently, through the internship, I developed rapport and further improved my interpersonal skills in working with these professionals to identify specific training needs and develop solutions.
Another important outcome of the internship is that I enhanced my skills in the areas of project planning and scoping. I was able to take information gathered through an initial needs analysis and use it to set broad learning goals, define cognitive and behavioral objectives, and design the courses to meet the needs of the adult participants in the program. Having experienced this process directly in a hands-on environment will prove invaluable in my future work.

**Relation of Work to Program Focus**

In order to best explain the relation of my work to the OLIT program focus, it is necessary to provide some information regarding the context of the Transition to Teaching project in which I was engaged. This nationwide program came about as a way to get quality teachers into underserved areas as rapidly as possible. The program’s intent was to attract individuals with bachelor’s degrees from rural/underserved communities who were interested in transitioning into teaching careers. In New Mexico, the courses in the program had been delivered face to face, meaning that participants had to drive in to Albuquerque over six separate weekends for professional development training. Moving to an online learning format helped reduce the travel, meal, and lodging costs and allowed 24-7 access to complete the coursework necessary for participants to receive alternative teaching licensure certification. I see this as representative of how online learning can provide better access to education and professional development for adult participants in remote areas as well as to those who have full time jobs, children, and other commitments, which do not easily allow them to participate in traditional face to face courses. Because I have interest in providing professional development training to healthcare workers in rural areas, the experience of this internship proved very beneficial when I was in the OLIT 501 – Instructional Design course. In that course, I developed a prototype distance learning plan for training hospice care providers in rural New Mexico.
The internship was also directly related to my understanding and development in areas that included the foundation of eLearning, understanding the distance learner, supporting learners in an online environment, and designing online instruction using various media and technologies. In transitioning previous face to face courses into an online format, I had to consider the possible learning styles of program participants. This involved thinking about how to incorporate learning experiences based on fundamental principles that I later identified as important aspects of adult learning in OLIT 561 and 514 (e.g. the VARK model and Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory).

The internship provided my first exposure to using the ADDIE instructional design model. For example, I had to do an initial analysis of the content from the face to face courses in order to determine how to best capture that content within the design capabilities of the learning management system. Additionally, I had the opportunity to observe first-hand the implementation of the design when the courses were first presented online. I also participated in the evaluation component of the ADDIE model by utilizing a redesigned evaluation instrument to gather participant feedback that could be used in refinement of the course.

Another way that the internship experience related to my OLIT program focus was in the way that the learning management system could be used to support standardized and consistent knowledge management. In other words, the LMS allows for the courses to be archived so that future instructors could easily access and re-use the existing content, update with new content, and/or customize the learning experience.

This project allowed me to become familiar with all the necessary processes and procedures involved in online course design, development, delivery, and evaluation within an LMS. Also, I was the technical contact for the end users/participants in the courses which
required me to have a deeper understanding of the technological aspects of the LMS and be able
to quickly and effectively respond to each user/participant.

**Overall Evaluation of the Learning Experience as a Whole**

My overall evaluation of this learning experience as a whole was very positive. The work
that I assumed in the internship allowed me to further develop and enhance my skills and
dispositions as a future instructional designer and eLearning specialist. I was given some latitude
to use my knowledge, skills, and personal discretion in working with instructors and subject
matter experts (SME’s) to plan and implement appropriate pedagogical online course design.
Also, what I consider to be a major take-away from the internship was learning to directly apply
key elements of distance education theory to the design and delivery of the professional
development training program.

This project was unique in that I had the opportunity to receive training and serve as
portal administrator for the NM Public Education Department’s portal on the IDEAL-NM
website, which meant that I received in-depth training on the Blackboard Learning Management
System. The training provided me with a great experience in learning the functionality and
underlying technology for both the back-end development environment and the front-end user
interface of Blackboard.

As mentioned previously, the internship experience gave me the opportunity to learn how
to interact with SME’s and team project members in order to work collaboratively in developing
appropriate and effective online learning experiences. As a result, I have a better idea of
questions to ask, what to look for, and how to communicate with SME’s in order to obtain the
information needed to assess, design, develop, implement, and evaluate a quality online course
design.
In reflection, there are some aspects of the overall experience that helped me realize the challenges of putting theory into practice. For example, I could design and develop an engaging and socially constructive online learning experience, but could not always count on the instructor or the students to embrace the design and use of interactive technologies. Often, this was due to their lack of time or disinterest in learning a new technology. The problem this created was related to a concept that I learned from an article addressing strategies for distance learning. In the article, Brundage, Keane, and Mackneson (1993) suggested that although technology is typically the conduit for communication and the flow of information, the teacher and students need to be comfortable with the technical delivery system. Otherwise, communication can be inhibited.

In conclusion, the internship experience provided a solid practical foundation for continuing my professional growth and development in the areas of instructional design and eLearning. I feel very positive about my contribution as well as the knowledge, skills, and experience that I gained being involved in the project.

References
